

The piglets were named Marge, Harold, Ruth, Ron and Laurie. The Timorese villagers were delighted with their litter, one of Laurie Cowled's first forays into the world of philanthropy. Unfortunately that scheme folded due to a scarcity of porcine participants, but Laurie was undeterred.

The daughter of brave Bethungra (between Cootamundra and Junee) farmers Marge and Harold Cowled, Laurie and her sister Ruth were educated at the tiny local school and then at Cootamundra High until its Intermediate Year limit. Times were tough on the land. The hardships of World War I had been followed by the Depression years and then World War II. Bright young girls like the Cowled pair had little opportunity to realise their potential, which is why Laurie now concentrates much of her philanthropy on scholarships and bursaries for young rural women, annually financing around twenty of them.

Laurie longed to be a ballerina, an actor or an artist. Geographical and financial restraints led her to a correspondence course in commercial art, which fizzled out after a matter of months. Then she took up banking, starting at the Cootamundra Commonwealth Bank as a 'temporary female assistant'. Obviously a 'temporary male assistant' was an entirely different kettle of fish. Ignoring the inglorious title, the indomitable Ms Cowled took every available course to climb the banking ladder, ending up by creating a huge crack for her female workmates in the glass ceiling at the Commonwealth.



Throughout her long career, mainly at the Sydney head office, Laurie outstripped her male counterparts — even when it came to 'shoot the bank robber' training. However she was not 100% devoted to the bean-counters. As the Australian television industry started to develop, Laurie worked nights and weekends for either Channel 9 or the ABC, and she also devoted some time to volunteering backstage in local theatre. Ultimately she left banking to join the real estate industry, making some very astute investments along the way.

Travel, however, has always been a very strong drawcard. Over the years the style became somewhat more up market. In 1954 she and talented artist/stage designer Ruth shared a six-berth cabin to Europe aboard the Orontes. Following Ruth's tragic death at a very young age, Laurie sometimes travelled with her parents. Much later on, she and her husband Ron Macnamara would fly wherever they wished in his own aircraft. Nowadays she travels all over the world, either with friends, her goddaughter, or the Australian Ballet, of which she is a patron. (And Laurie is very proud that today one of the only two indigenous dancers at the Australian Ballet is a Cowled bursary recipient.)

Last year of course, the keen globe-trotter was baulked by some odd sort of anti-travel virus. Attending a wedding in Guernsey, with visits to Ireland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia was cancelled. A god daughterly birthday celebration at Italy's Lake Garda (with time en route at Doha's brilliant Museum of Islamic Art) was cancelled. And then a trip to Manchester and London with the Australian Ballet was .. that's right, cancelled.

Undefeated, Laurie kept the travel bug well fed by taking it to Carnarvon Gorge, Heron Island and Hervey Bay. And at the spritely age of 91, she has very fond memories of birthdaying the previous year at the Galapagos Islands.

Laurie and Ron were married too late to envisage the delights of parenthood. Laurie shudders at the thought and admits her maternal instincts are not sufficiently developed for her ever to have been termed 'clucky'. They both agreed that whichever one of them lived the longest, would distribute their assets to charity. Laurie was 75 when Ron died. She decided she wanted to observe how their money was spent and what it could achieve.



Apart from the piglets (now you have worked out who they were named for) most of Laurie's funding has been to support the further education of young rural women. However one generous contribution was made due to Laurie's membership of this Club. After playing in the Bridge for Brains competition, she has financially supported five female brain research PhD graduates.

An accountant, Ron had always wanted to study medicine. In his memory Laurie has established a nursing scholarship for women to do a Masters degree in Nursing Practice. The recipient must work above the Tropic of Capricorn. In memory of her beloved sister, Laurie has created Memorial Bursaries to support NIDA students from rural areas. She has also contributed to students at the University of New South Wales and Sydney's University of Technology.

While many may regard Laurie as a bit of a saint, she herself believes that description belongs to Mary Kelly who recently retired from the Queensland University of Technology. Laurie says Mary was the spirit behind QUT setting up the Learning Potential Fund around 1998 to provide scholarships and bursaries to those who would otherwise be financially unable to continue study. The QUT now matches donations \$ for \$, aiming to build its fund to \$100 million, Laurie being one of its prominent benefactors. On a more local note, Laurie gave a lump sum to the Sunshine Coast University to assist women studying Science, Technology or Mathematics. Interest rates being somewhat self-effacing of late, that lump sum needs a bit of help from Laurie to achieve its aims.



Laurie's Bridge career began in Sydney. On moving to Noosa in 1984 she took lessons from Margia Warren at our Club. Those were the days when the Bridge Club lived at St James's Hall near Gympie Terrace and also the days when the Church decided to sell the hall. Former banker and real estate professional Laurie got together with then President Rosemary Green and other Committee members. Together they agreed to borrow money to buy the property, with Laurie going guarantor. Later they sold it at a profit and gained Council permission for a permanent site at Wallace Park. Laurie arose at 3.30 that morning to follow the low-loader unceremoniously conveying the building, power lines removed all along the way. The Eumundi Road roundabout had yet to be planted with trees, so the low-loader just lumbered across the middle. "Did you drive behind it?" this interviewer enquired. "No, I walked," answered Laurie. "We arrived mid-morning." John Mainwaring designed a new wing and the matching premises took shape.

Practicing philanthropy while you are still alive to see the results provides enormous interest and joy to the philanthropist, whether you are Bill and Melinda Gates, Warren Buffet, or our wonderful Laurie. Eschewing the visible trappings of wealth, she lives fairly simply in a retirement villa, paintings by local artists and her sister Ruth upon the walls. At 91 she looks about 75 and acts about 60. A formidable force, no wonder the 'temporary males' at the Commonwealth Bank were so in awe of her.

by Susie Osmaston\\